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# Ward, Kent oral history interview

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## **Interview with Kent Ward by Greg Beam**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Ward, Kent

### **Interviewer**

Beam, Greg

### **Date**

July 25, 2000

### **Place**

Lewiston, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 212

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### **Biographical Note**

Kent Ward was born May 4, 1932 in Limestone, Maine. His mother was a librarian and his father worked in the gardening business. He had seven siblings, graduated from high school in 1949 and went to Becker Junior College in Worcester, Massachusetts to study journalism. Upon graduation, he spent two years in Korea and then became the editor for the *Limestone Leader* and worked there for eight years. In 1962, he moved to the *Bangor Daily News* and became their Rockland Bureau Chief for three years. There, he went from general assignment, to state editor (covered politics for six years), to Maine editor, and retired as associate managing editor. At the time of this interview he continued to contribute articles to the *Bangor Daily News*.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: Limestone, Maine; family background; Korea; the Great Depression; *Limestone Leader*; *Bangor Daily News*; Albert Paul and his escape from prison; Maine politics in the 1960s; Ken Curtis; 1968 and 1972 Democratic and Republican National Conventions; Muskie anecdote from campaigning in Maine in the 1970s; Muskie's temper; Louis Jalbert; and John Day.

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## **Transcript**

**Kent Ward:** . . . remember that because when he put his date line down he spelled it wrong. So he's done a lot and he knows, and he's home the whole month of August. He's at his, Sugarloaf, he has a condo at Sugarloaf. He's a Maine native and he comes home in August, so he'd be ideal.

**Greg Beam:** Oh wow, yeah, yeah, she's um in the process of trying to contact him right now. In fact she just spoke to me about him yesterday, and you know, she's been asking around, you know, so that we can get some background so that we'll have a place to start from. And, yeah, it sounds very interesting. I don't know, probably either she or I will conduct that interview, hopefully we'll be able to schedule time with him this summer. And I'm sure that'll be very

interesting. I'm looking forward to it if I get to do that, so, so it'll be interesting.

**KW:** Yeah, he'd be (*unintelligible phrase*), you know.

**GB:** All right, so, all right, this is Greg Beam and I'm here with Kent Ward at the Muskie Archives in Lewiston, Maine. The date is July 25th, 2000 and it's 2:00 P.M. To begin, could you please state your full name and spell it.

**KW:** OK. My name is Kent Ward, K-E-N-T, W-A-R-D, and I live in Winterport. And I've worked, had worked for the *Bangor Daily News* for thirty years give or take a few years, and I'm still, even though I retired nine years ago, I still write a weekly column for the *News*.

**GB:** And when and where were you born?

**KW:** Limestone, up in The County [*Aroostook County is often referred to as "The County" in Maine*]. A county boy, on May 4th, 1932 so I'm sixty-eight.

**GB:** Wow. Did you grow up in Limestone?

**KW:** Yes, I did, yeah.

**GB:** Wow. And what were your parents' names?

**KW:** Okay, my father's name was Frank and my mother's name was Muriel, and they're both of course deceased. I had, there were eight kids in the family, so four boys and four girls, six still living, scattered around. Some in the county, some, one in California, one in Pennsylvania. Lots of times people have to leave the county even though it's a great place to live, they have to leave to find work, so.

**GB:** Yeah. What were your parents' occupations up in Limestone?

**KW:** My father was a, well in the later, his later life was a, had a nursery business, nursery store business, tree surgeon, that sort of thing. But he did a little bit of everything as most people in those days did. Earlier on he worked on a farm, he worked for the town, he worked in the woods operations for many years, and then he had his own business towards the end of it, it was a nursery business.

My mother was a homemaker, with eight kids you can imagine. And, but when most of the kids were grown up and gone, why she was a town librarian and she was the head cook for the school lunch program. But she retired as the librarian for the town of Limestone. Which is where I think one place where I got my love for books. I have a house full of books and half of them I've read and half of them I'm going to when I get around to it. But I'm constantly reading and I think I got a lot of that from her.

**GB:** What kind of stuff did you read when you were a kid, when you were growing up?

**KW:** Basically biographies. I never had the time for fiction, I always felt that I wanted to learn and it was biographies and histories and stuff. And I still read a lot of that but I have accepted fiction in the last few years and enjoyed it. But I'll read anything and everything basically.

**GB:** Now where did you fall in the mix of those eight children?

**KW:** I was next to the youngest. I have a younger brother still living in Limestone and he's two years younger than I am, so. The eight of us were, see, my oldest sister is about to celebrate her eightieth birthday, so, and my younger brother is sixty-six so we had eight in the space of fourteen years. But that was an average family for those days and in that part of the country, as this part of the country. Large families were common. I remember going to school with a couple of young fellows who were from a family of twenty-four. Large families were common.

**GB:** From one mother?

**KW:** One mother. And she outlived the father.

**GB:** Wow, that's amazing, that's astounding.

**KW:** But twelve, you know, twelve kids, ten kids, eight kids, that wasn't unusual.

**GB:** Oh boy. Now, I was going to ask you, I know that Limestone is a fairly small community today, I'm wondering if it was so small back in those days with so many kids hanging around.

**KW:** Twenty, I think twenty-four hundred before the base came, Loring Air Force Base came to town in 1948, '49, right in there. And then the population grew to ten thousand because the base proper is in Limestone and so Limestone got to count all of the airmen and their dependents for, the ones who lived on base, as part of the population of the town of Limestone. So it grew to about ten thousand, and now it's back down to twenty-four hundred roughly I think.

**GB:** Before Loring Air Force Base came in what was the economic center or focus of the community (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**KW:** Agriculture and potatoes.

**GB:** Potatoes, yeah.

**KW:** Yeah, farming was it. As in most of those communities, all of them up there except for Madawaska which is a paper mill town. But other than that everything else was agricultural.

**GB:** Being so far north did you feel disconnected from the rest of the state or did you have any connections?

**KW:** Well, yeah, I would say we were disconnected. To go to Boston, when I got into high school we used to take occasional trips to go down and see the Red Sox and it was, it was quite a

project. We used to go down and drive down, and that was before the Interstate also, drive down and drive back, have done that. Oftentimes we would stay over and see a couple of games but we've driven down, driven back. That would be about, geez, a thousand mile round trip. It's about four fifty from my home to Boston I think, four fifty, five hundred, something like that.

**GB:** It must have been a full day's drive down to Boston in those days.

**KW:** Oh yes, oh yes, yeah.

**GB:** Because I know it takes about, what, five hours from Lewiston to Limestone today.

**KW:** Yeah. It's a, Limestone to Bangor is a three hour, three and a half, three fifteen hour drive with the nice highways, as you say.

**GB:** Yeah. And what was the ethnic make up of Limestone when you were growing up?

**KW:** White Anglo Saxon, Protestant. It's funny, my town was really the buffer zone between the Protestants and Catholics of the St. John River Valley. From Fort Kent on down through Van Buren and Hamlin was predominantly Roman Catholic, and then starting in Limestone and heading south were basically Protestant. So we were the buffer zone and it was kind of nice growing up that way because you learned tolerance, you know. There wasn't a lot of tolerance between those two factions in many cases, but growing up where we all mingled in together going to school every day, and my best friend is a Roman Catholic. And it's not a big issue today but in those days it was, it was, you know, something to think about. We never had any problems, we got along famously, you know. But I was always kind of glad that we were in an area where we mixed, you know, and got to learn each other's cultures. So I'd say my town was probably half and half, maybe sixty-forty Protestant-Catholic.

**GB:** I see. And how were your parents involved in the Limestone community when you were growing up?

**KW:** Not, well, you know, participate in town meeting. As a matter of fact my father quite vigorously. But, you know, the, and they of course always encouraged the kids to, you know, play sports and join in and everything. But they weren't, I wouldn't call them community leaders.

**GB:** What kind of values would you say they instilled in you (*unintelligible word*)?

**KW:** Oh, hard work and don't ever buy anything on credit. Pay cash or don't buy it. Hard work, I remember, my God. The child labor laws would come into play now but I, and everybody else that I know of, I started picking potatoes in the fields when I was five years old. And that's going out in the morning at six o'clock and working until six at night, twelve-hour day, and I of course picked potatoes all my life, you know. It's a way to earn spending money, a way to earn money for clothing and school supplies and that sort of thing. Everybody picked potatoes around. But hard work I would say would be a, you know, and respect for others and all that but basically work ethic.

**GB:** I see. And what religious denomination did you belong to, Protestant or -?

**KW:** Protestant or Methodist.

**GB:** Methodist. Were you strongly religious?

**KW:** No, no, not very strong. My mother of course always wanted everybody to be and we humored her as kids growing up and went to church fairly regularly but later on we sort of drifted away from it, so. But we were Protestant but not strong.

**GB:** I see. And when you were growing up and through high school, what were your interests, academic or otherwise?

**KW:** Well, sports. Every, anything to do with a ball, you know, basketball, baseball. We didn't have football but, track, winter sports. We used to have a winter carnival with the snowshoe and ski competition, that sort of thing. But baseball and basketball, I was going to be the next Lou (*name*), I was going to play shortstop to the Cleveland Indians but somehow it never worked out.

And then I always knew in high school that I wanted to be a newspaper man and don't ask me how I knew it, but I knew, I, it appealed to me. I always say jokingly I guess that I always, I perceived early on that I could get in to most anyplace for free and have a front row seat, you know, and then report on it. I thought what better job could there be than that. Sure as hell beat picking potatoes for a living. So I always wanted to be in journalism, although we never called it journalism in those days.

And in high school I was a, the Limestone correspondent for Presque Isle radio station, WAGM, and that really got me interested. And there I had to cover town meetings and that, and I was just a kid in high school, and had to file my reports probably three times a week and it was on the radio and everything. And then I followed that up by, after I graduated from high school in 1949 I went to Becker Junior College in Worcester, Massachusetts and took a journalism course. And then went in the Army and served two years in the Army, here, two here and Korea.

And then when I got out I became the editor for my hometown weekly which was, had just started up. It was called the *Limestone Leader* and I was the news editor there for eight years before I moved on to the *Bangor Daily News* and became their Rockland bureau chief down in Rockland in 1962. And then moved into Bangor three years later and, you know, stayed there for thirty years (*unintelligible phrase*). General assignment, state editor, covered politics for about six years, three legislative sessions, and then became Maine editor. M-A-I-N-E, state of Maine editor, which was in charge of the city desk and the state desk. And then retired as associate managing editor, it was the last, oh, eight, ten year I guess, assistant managing editor and then associate managing editor.

**GB:** Right, now backing up a little bit, your time serving in Korea, did it have a profound impact on you?

**KW:** Yeah, I would say so. I didn't get over there, I took basic, the war was still on. The war got over in July 27th in 1953. I got over there just after Christmas of 1953, first week in January I think. So as you can imagine it was still pretty impoverished, I mean, the war had only been over five, six months. Yeah, it had quite an effect on me because everything was so damn, everybody was so poor. A lot of orphans, you know, and that sort of thing.

And I certainly knew how lucky we were to be Americans after seeing that, that culture there. Now today there's all the difference in the world between South Korea and North Korea between the two systems, you know. Democratic system in South Korea and then the dictator up north there, I mean, and the systems show which is better. At that particular time it was, you know, as you can imagine, the war had just gotten over with and it was pretty bleak.

**GB:** Yeah. What were your political views then?

**KW:** What were they then or what are they now?

**GB:** What were they then and you can trace it through, you know, to -

**KW:** No, they're the same now as they always were. I'd say I'm a Republican, moderate, moderate to conservative. I'm certainly not a conservative Republican by any means. I, I'm a Republican I would say in the mold of, of somebody like Bill Cohen, you know, able to see both sides of the picture instead of far left or far right.

**GB:** And is there a history of I guess affiliation with the Republican Party in your family, or (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**KW:** Oh yes, oh sure. I mean, most, well in the, when I grew up, when I was growing up it was predominantly Republican. This, I think my town, home town now has since become Democratic, I would say by the, by their, they keep electing Democrats to the legislature so I got a feeling that the tide has turned there. But, yeah, growing up you'd hear people, my father included, say something like, "He's a pretty damned good feller for a Democrat," you know, (*unintelligible phrase*) for a Democrat so there was a distinction (*unintelligible phrase*).

**GB:** Now, actually I just thought of something, I'm going to back track again even further. You were growing up for a time during the Depression. Do you have any recollections of that era?

**KW:** Well I was born in the Depression, I was born in '32, yeah. Well yeah, just that we were poor, we didn't know it, you know, as it often happens you don't know it until later. But everybody else was poor too, also. But I do remember the, the, I guess you'd call it welfare assistance today, the food that was handed out in the schools. All the kids got little lunches, I can remember, breakfasts, the little boxes of Maltex cereal. I don't think I've ever seen it since, it's something like cream of wheat only darker. Oranges, an orange a day, that sort of thing. And, but we weren't any worse off than anybody else, the whole town was, you know, in the same boat. I remember those, of course then, that was, I was a very young kid then and then by



the time I got into high school why things were much better.

Everything depended on potatoes again and those were good potato years. That's when Maine, Aroostook county led the nation in potato production. They since, oh, Idaho and a few other states have taken over, but in those days when potatoes were good everybody lived well, you know. It's some-, the saying went, when the markets good we have a lot of cash and when it's not we eat a lot of hash. You know, we always had potatoes to eat, so. No, everything depended on agriculture and when the Depression got over with and times, in the forties, Second World War, right in that era, that was a good time in Aroostook County.

**GB:** Now, I'm curious. Did your father consider Roosevelt pretty good for a Democrat, or?

**KW:** No, I, he, my father worked on a WPA project. In the town of Limestone they built this huge dam and we had a nice pond for swimming and all. And it's still there today, but that was a WPA project so, and he was employed by that, so I suspect Roosevelt probably was all right at the time.

**GB:** Okay, so back to where we left off, you came back from Korea and did you say you went straight to the *Bangor Daily News*, or?

**KW:** Oh, let's see, 1954, no, I went to the *Limestone Leader*.

**GB:** Oh, *Limestone Leader*, that's right, that's right. Um.

**KW:** And I worked under the G.I. Bill- was what they called on the job training and I think my employer, I made sixty five dollars a week and my employer only had to pay fifteen dollars of that and the government under the G.I. Bill paid the other fifty. So that was a good program because I probably, if it hadn't been for the G.I. Bill, I probably wouldn't have gotten that job because he got me for peanuts. But it was good experience.

**GB:** And what did you do there?

**KW:** Well I was everything. There was my boss who sold advertising and then I did everything else. I took the photos, wrote the stories, took care of the newsboys, helped with the billing, circulation, and just everything except selling ads. And like I say, it was an experience, you know, that you couldn't buy. I mean you got to meet all kinds of people in all kinds of situations and did a little bit of everything.

**GB:** I see. Did you just write on the Limestone and Aroostook area or did you kind of spread out through the state for that job?

**KW:** No, it was more Limestone and Loring Air Force Base, just a (*unintelligible phrase*). Because we were one of, we were a small weekly, I think our circulation was only three thousand. And there were of course weeklies and all the other towns around here, Caribou, Presque Isle, Fort Fairfield, Houlton all had weeklies so we were small fish.

**GB:** I see. Actually, 1954, so when you took that job that was the same year, you know, Muskie was running for governor. Did you have any encounters with that campaign?

**KW:** No because by the time I got there it was December of '54 so . . . .

**GB:** Oh, boy, okay, so the election was all done.

**KW:** Yeah, I was still in Korea when he was, yeah, campaigning, so I don't know that, that election at all except to know that there were a number of what were referred to as quite a few Muskie Republicans who voted for Muskie because he was such a good man to vote for, you know. And that's where that term came into being, that election I believe. But I don't know much about that election.

**GB:** Sure, sure. What was your reaction, though, coming back and hearing, wow, we just had this Democrat elected to, you know, elected as governor. The first time it had happened in a long time. Who would have thought.

**KW:** I thought he must be quite a special guy, you know, and thought it was something. But I don't remember being, you know, politically, all that politically aware at that time, if I ever was. I was just glad to get home, get out of the Army and get home.

**GB:** So how long did you say you were with the *Limestone Leader*?

**KW:** Eight years, eight years until 1962 when I went and worked for the *Bangor News*.

**GB:** *Bangor News*.

**KW:** *Bangor Daily News*.

**GB:** Okay, and what were you first covering when you went to the *Bangor Daily News*?

**KW:** I was the Rockland bureau chief, and on Rockland for, and I covered all of Knox county and parts of Waldo, for three, three and a half years I guess. I moved into Bangor in mid '65.

**GB:** Moved into Bangor in '65, okay.

**KW:** Yeah, fall of '65.

**GB:** Okay. And what kind of stories did you cover in those first three years in that area?

**KW:** Oh, there again everything, because as a bureau chief you're almost, it was almost the same situation as back in Limestone except I didn't have to worry about circulation and newsboys and everything else. But I did stories, whatever came up. I mean, you know, tragedies or anything to do with the port of Rockland. Politics, when politicians came through, and took all my own photos.

In those days we were hooked up to Bangor by a teletype machine and I had to share it with John Day down in, who was the Machias bureau chief at that same time, and so we shared a tele-, a line I should say, and had to fight for air time to get our stories into Bangor. Of course everybody waits until the deadline and then everybody tries to get on the line and file their stories. If Machias has got the teletype tied up then Rockland couldn't use it and vice versa, so. But I had a woman who worked for me, a, you know, a secretary, a puncher, she punched (*unintelligible word*) in the machine but other than that I did everything myself for three years.

But Rockland's an awful nice place, nice people, reminded me a lot of Aroostook county people, Maine people in general. But it's an easy, I think, it's an easy place to cover because first of all you can't go east without you're in the Atlantic ocean and you go west and you only got to go-coming from Aroostook county I thought the distances in Knox county were ridiculously close. Because you only had to go fifteen miles to Union, which was the fringe of my coverage area, you know, fifteen miles or whatever to Waldoboro, five miles to Thomaston, seven miles to Camden. I thought, my God, up home in the county when you go anywhere you have to pack a lunch, you know, to go over to the next town. And so I thought that covering Knox County was really quite easy as far as getting around. But I never told my bosses that.

**GB:** Want to make them think you were working harder than you were, right?

**KW:** Well we used to work long hours, get up to cover district court and I'd have to be in there by eight thirty, in district court, and be working until sometimes eleven o'clock at night. It just depends on the flow of the news, but that's normal work day for, or it used to be anyway, for news people, newspaper people.

**GB:** That's changed since?

**KW:** It's changed now because, especially where people are, where papers might be unionized and you have to pay overtime. Those days you never got overtime, I mean you just covered the story and you worked nights, Sundays, holidays, whatever it took to cover the story. And you had your two weeks vacation and didn't have to worry about it. But now everything, it's restricted, you can only work so many hours and then get in overtime and the bosses don't like to pay overtime so, scheduling.

**GB:** So were you on a wage at that time?

**KW:** Yeah, salary, yeah.

**GB:** Okay. And do any issues from that time pop into your head that were particularly interesting that you covered, any big stories, or?

**KW:** Well my most interesting story I think was, I covered a, while I was down in the space of three years there were several escapees from the Maine State Prison which is in Thomaston. It's only five miles away, it's part of my coverage area. But this one, one guy escaped, his name was Albert Paul, and he's since escaped several times but. Remember the saying 'Albert Paul went over the wall'. And he actually escaped from inside the state prison and he, he was out for

several days and he had holed up in a barn over in Warren and this old couple lived there, old farmer and his wife. And Albert was up in the hay mow sleeping and stealing vegetables out of their garden and the old farmer noticed that his cucumbers were missing and he thought it was animals and he went out with a shotgun.

Anyway, he roused out, he found Albert Paul sleeping in the barn and he brought him into the house, with his gun. And then Albert Paul and this old couple sit down and talked all morning and he, either he made blueberry muffins, or I, no, I think the woman, the wife made him blueberry muffins and they had a hell of a nice time. You know, social chit chat, and then Albert went on his way down the road.

And of course after he had gone they sort of contacted the authorities and I got wind of it. So I went over to interview the old couple and what a great story it was. I mean, here he is, in a picture, he is standing in his bib overalls, you know, an old grey haired guy maybe in his late seventies. And she was there just a typical country woman, nice, solid, soul of the earth Mainer and they told me the story about how he wasn't such a bad fellow, you know, kinda enjoyed him.

And, geez, I had, I got a great story. I remember it played at page one with the picture and everything else, and that was probably the most interesting story I ever did. Yeah, I mean it was, I just, I, and I got the story by paying attention, there again, being on the job and listening to the scanner. I heard scanner transit and so I, they said the address where this had happened over on the Fintown Road in Warren in Waldoboro and so I ran over and interviewed them before the cops were there to shoo me away.

Subsequently he, Albert Paul was picked up by I think a major. The major at the Thomaston barracks was out driving in an unmarked car and Albert Paul was hitchhiking and a state trooper picked him up and took him back to Thomaston. And he subsequently I think broke out again either once or twice and then he, he got in some real trouble. I'm not sure, he might have killed a person later on or whatever, but he was an interesting character, I remember that.

**GB:** Did you ever get to talk to him?

**KW:** Not to him.

**GB:** Now, did, I'm curious, did these people know that he was an escaped convict?

**KW:** Oh yeah, yeah, oh yeah, yeah they knew.

**GB:** Did they ever get in trouble for that, because it's aiding and abetting or something?

**KW:** No, no, they just, no because after he had left, after they had fed him and, they did contact the authorities, you know.

**GB:** Oh, so they just kind of let it slide, yeah, all right.

**KW:** Yeah, no, it was a real good, it was a nice story. That's probably one of the better stories that I did. But it was a, Rockland is a good place for strange things happening. I mean, you got

the ocean, like I say, and the lobster men and there's always something going on there, from people cutting other people's traps to whatever. And it's, you know, with the lobster festival and the tourism and all that sort of thing, it's a pretty lively community. There's always something going on. If you can't turn out a lot of copy as a news man there you can't turn it out anywhere. It's everywhere.

**GB:** So you enjoyed your time there?

**KW:** Oh much, very much, yeah. In fact I still have friends and I still go back quite regularly. My dentist is still in Rockland, after all these years I go down there.

**GB:** How, that must be a trip from Bangor?

**KW:** I live in Winterport. It's only, oh, remember now where I come from, it's only forty miles one way.

**GB:** Now where is Winterport?

**KW:** Winterport's thirteen miles south of Bangor on the river, yeah, (*unintelligible word*).

**GB:** So what, you moved to Bangor in 1965?

**KW:** Yeah.

**GB:** And how did that come about, what brought you to Bangor?

**KW:** Well, I had an interview. I thought I was getting a little stagnant in Rockland because there's another thing that happens in Rockland at the Samoset Hotel. They have conventions every year, and you've got to say well, if this is July 25th this must be the Maine Medical Association, you know, every year the same thing. And I thought, my God, another couple more years of this and I'm going to be talking to myself, you know, same stories year after year.

And so I, there was a job open in Augusta at the Dept. of Economic Development, they needed a PR guy. And John Reed was the governor then, and I went over and interviewed for it and he subsequently chose somebody else. But in the meantime, my managing editor knew that I was looking and so he come down and offered me the job of assistant state editor if I were to move into Bangor, be a general assignment reporter. And I didn't get the other job anyway, and I'm awfully glad I didn't by the way. I, my profession is the journalism profession, I'm so glad that, you know, how things work out. I'm glad I did not get that job with DED, Department of Economic Development. So I was able to stay in journalism and thirty some years later I retired.

**GB:** Now why did you apply for that job with the DED?

**KW:** Well, like I said, I was getting a little, I don't know, the word's not sick but I, you know, covering the same thing year after year after year. I just felt it was time to move on to bigger challenge really, you know. Not that Rockland wasn't a nice place to cover but, you know, after

the fourth time around, why, it got to be old hat.

**GB:** There wasn't anything about that job in particular that interested you, it was just a way out.

**KW:** Oh no, no, no, no, yeah, yeah, I wanted to, I wanted to move up.

**GB:** I see. So what were you covering when you came to Bangor?

**KW:** Bangor, I was a general assignment reporter, which means that you cover everything, which is what I wanted to do anyway. I mean you, today a murder, tomorrow a traffic accident, the next day, you know, Senator Muskie coming through or whatever. And so I did that for a while. But I was also, at the same time I was the assistant state editor which means we were in charge of, well my desk was in charge of all the correspondents out in the field and all the bureaus, plus about eight or ten reporters right there on the desk in Bangor. And we had, at that time we used to have a correspondent in every little town in eastern Maine. We had a hundred and twenty correspondents I think at the time. And, you know, little old ladies that, sending in news briefs and things, and we gradually did away with that system and then just relied on the bureaus and that's where we are today. Was, Bangor did the Maine office and then we have, now I guess they probably have ten or twelve bureaus around the state. And then from the state editor, as assistant state editor I also started covering politics in '67, 103rd legislature was the first legislature.

**GB:** All right, and did you cover mostly legislative sessions, or did you cover, you know, all kinds of politics, campaigns and -?

**KW:** All kinds. But I did spend most of the time in Augusta. But at time we didn't, now the people who cover Augusta for the *Bangor News* live in Augusta. But then I had to travel back and forth. I was there like, they would only meet like three days a week, the legislature, three or four days a week. So I'd go over there and stay in the Senator Motel for two or three nights and then come back and work weekends in Bangor. And that got to be quite a rat race. But I did also cover various campaigns, too.

**GB:** Such as?

**KW:** Well, Governor Curtis, anybody running for congress or United States senate. Didn't bother with the legislative campaigns because there were just too damn many of them, you know. Unless they happened to be, you know, on a ticket with somebody else out of Bangor or something, why you might give them some ink, but.

**GB:** I see, okay, so what were some of the, when you were covering those legislative sessions, those three legislative sessions you covered?

**KW:** No, I think I did, I think it was three and then there might have been a special session in there later on to help out, too, but I think it was (*unintelligible word*).

**GB:** What were some of the big issues in the legislature at that time?

**KW:** Well as I recall the, unless my memory fails me here, and it's been quite a while, but I think that for a session I was there was either the SADs, the school administrative districts were formed that year or maybe just the session before. But around the same time the University of Maine system was consolidated. That was a big issue. Remember they used, I don't know if you realize, but there used to be the different campuses: Augusta, Machias, Fort Kent and Gorham and all that. Which they're still there but they were separate, you know. Now they're one system. That was the big issue I think in the 103rd or 104th. And then, well the usual budget problems, you know. One that would stand out would be the consolidation of the University of Maine system, I guess. I'll probably think of a dozen more when I'm headed back to Bangor.

**GB:** All right, now some of these campaigns you covered, you covered Ken Curtis's campaign?

**KW:** Yeah, yeah.

**GB:** And could you tell me about that?

**KW:** Ken Curtis was and is one of the nicest guys you'd ever want to meet and if you can't like Ken Curtis you don't like anybody. And just so natural, very fun, a lot of fun to be with. He's about my same age, he's about the same age as I am. And honest, forthright, tell you stuff that he probably shouldn't be telling you, you know. And just a joy to campaign with.

**GB:** What sort of things did he tell you that he probably shouldn't have been telling you?

**KW:** Well, number one, he might give you some inside politics and, so that you would know later when something was going to happen. I can't really give you any examples but it's, it's things like-. As a news man you learn early on, you don't write everything you know. And if you show a politician that he can, he or she can trust you, they might tell you something off the record just so that you'll be prepared for something down the road. And if you can pass that test why you generally have a pretty good source later on. That's not to say that you cover up stuff, it's just to say that you know that you don't write everything you know.

**GB:** You tactfully decided what to put in print.

**KW:** Yeah, and then later, later lots of times you can write it but timing is everything. But Ken Curtis was good about that, about cluing me in to things that might be going to happen. But he was a very, and is, I keep saying was, is a very gregarious person and the public adored him as far as I could see. I mean he was, once you had met him, you know, he, he was very popular as a governor and as a campaigner.

**GB:** Did you cover anything having to do with Muskie's vice presidential campaign in '68?

**KW:** I covered the, yes I did. I covered the Democratic National Convention for the *News*, I

was out in Chicago. And I also went to the 1972 convention in Miami Beach, both Republican and Democrat, so I got to cover three national conventions including the '68 with the riots and all.

**GB:** Yeah, that was a pretty wild, wild week, wasn't it?

**KW:** Yeah, yeah, I can still smell the tear gas, you know, taste it. We weren't, we were at the Holiday Inn, which wasn't in the center of the activity, you know, all the demonstrations and all that. But we got down, myself and some of the delegates, Severin Beliveau and a few more got down to see part of it. A lot of it happened while we were in session, in the, the convention was in session. As a matter of fact, it was so bad in the streets while the convention was going on that a lot of the people, not a lot but some delegates and delegations were insisting that they suspend the convention because everybody was watching it on TV, the rioting in the streets, and here's the convention going on. But they didn't, those people all got gaveled down as I recall and the convention continued on and Mayor Daley ran the show. But it was an exciting time, no doubt about that.

I remember when Hubert Humphrey announced that Senator Muskie would be his vice presidential candidate, partner, nominee. Did it like on a four o'clock, the day after Humphrey had won the nomination. About four o'clock the next afternoon he announced that Muskie would be, I think it was a, as I recall, a contest between Muskie, boiled down to Muskie, Fred Harris of Oklahoma, Sargent Shriver basically were the final three left standing and he chose Muskie over Fred Harris. In those days, now like today they've announce the Republican nominee Dick Cheney and I guess the Democrats will do likewise before their convention, but in those days as I recall they didn't do this until the convention, you know. Even though, maybe, you know, there was a lot of speculation and a lot of it pretty accurate, but they never named them until the actual convention. So that's a change.

**GB:** That must have been a pretty exciting announcement that Ed Muskie was going to be the vice presidential candidate.

**KW:** Oh yeah, the Democrats, the Democratic delegation, I traveled with them of course out and back and everything, and they were sky high. I mean just ecstatic, you know, it just, a native son of Maine. Those were heady days for the Democrats, no doubt about it.

**GB:** Was it exciting for you even as a Republican?

**KW:** Yeah, it was, oh, definitely, yeah. See, but, don't, yeah, I'm a registered Republican but I'm not, you know, I cover them both with equal, equal favor or disfavor, however you want to look at it. You know, it was exciting, of course it was exciting just to be in Chicago, to have what was happening happen, you know, that was exciting in itself. But to be, to be there with the national press corps and everything covering the convention as they were covering it was kind of nice, kind of exciting for a small town newspaperman from Maine, you know. But you could feel the, you know, felt the pride and all in the delegation, sure.

**GB:** What are your memories of the riot and that whole mess?



**KW:** Well, I just remember that there was an awful lot of, well, I guess you'd call it police brutality. I mean they were, they ran amok. I mean they just, they were bashing kids, you know, for no particular reason other than that they had long hair probably and were, you know, saying things, saying nasty things to, showing nasty things to the cops. But they tear gassed them and beat them and everything. I remember being down the next day and the National Guard was all lined up around Brandt Park and had their rifles at the ready and there were barbed wire, rolls of barbed wire. But, and trying to talk to the National Guardsmen and they wouldn't talk to you, you know, just move along, move along, right. And I got shoved into a, and I had my press credentials on and I was walking down the street and I got shoved into a taxi cab by a cop, along with another journalist. And I wasn't even going, I wasn't going anywhere, I wanted to stay there on the sidewalk and he says, get in there, and he shoved me in this taxi cab and we pulled off.

**GB:** Oh wow. Can you hold on one second, I'm going to - . . .

*End of Side A, Tape One*  
*Side B, Tape One*

**GB:** This is fantastic. We're now on Side B of the tape of an interview with Kent Ward. And you were just telling me about the riots out in Chicago. Um, so this cop shoved you into the taxi I suppose because they were trying to get the newsmen out of there?

**KW:** Oh yeah, get the hell out, get everybody there, espe-, they didn't like the news men (*unintelligible word*), yeah, around watching them. So they were, I don't know, they just, like I say they were, well, you'd have to say out of control, or on the edge of being out of control I thought. But of course I'd never seen anything like that before either, you know, so how do you judge, I mean was this worse than the other one, than the last riot, you know? And really, of course and the cops have a tough job, too, you know. I mean let's face it, they're damned if they do and damned if they don't, so it's. And I've got to say this, that the kids were provoking them, I mean there's no doubt about that. It was all over Vietnam of course, the Vietnam War. I mean that was the basis for the, for the demonstrations.

**GB:** Did you cover the Vietnam War in any respect?

**KW:** No, not really, I mean you know, just guys coming back and that sort of thing. But no, never wrote extensively about it.

**GB:** I'm curious, did you write, did you comment on the riot in your report on the convention?

**KW:** Yeah, I did, you know, and I can't find, I thought I had all of those papers home and I'm sure I do some place. And I should have gone probably into the *Bangor Daily News* before I came down here to see what I wrote. But yes, I wrote, I was writing, I had started writing a political column then as well as covering politics and that column evolved into what I write today which I call modified smart ass. It's developed into a whole different column but it started out as a politics column and, political column. And I wrote some from there but I can't recall

what I said other than what I just told you basically, you know, and elaborated on. There were some pretty weird sights, I remember that.

**GB:** So in '72 you covered the Democratic National Convention again and the Republican National Convention as well.

**KW:** Right, yeah, both in Miami Beach as I recall.

**GB:** They were both in Miami Beach, all right. Which one was first?

**KW:** I think the Republicans in August, and I remember we ran a big promotional ad in the *Bangor Daily News* and, with my, a full page ad, with my picture on it and it says, Why is this man going to Miami Beach in August? (*unintelligible phrase*) dumb, right. Then it said to cover the Republican National Convention. Yeah, the Republicans were first and then the Democrats and there again. Let's see, that was Nixon, yeah, Nixon, they'd be, yeah.

**GB:** Yeah, it must have been uncontested, yeah.

**KW:** Yeah, and that one was okay. And then the Democrats, they weren't as exciting. Nothing, everything paled in comparison to Chicago of course. You know, I mean it was fun to be there, nice to be there and, you know, see everything going on. But it wasn't, it wasn't the eye opener that Chicago was.

**GB:** Was it a different experience, was there a different dynamic between the two conventions, the Republican and the Democratic in '72?

**KW:** I don't know how to answer that. Both, there again, thirty years ago, right? I don't remember much about it to tell you the truth. I mean, other than that it was a lot of work. It sounds glamorous, by the way, from the point of view of the newsman. But I remember myself and Dave, David Bright went with me as a photographer, he was a reporter then but he was a good photographer, but he went on his own. And he would take pictures and I would do the copy and then we'd try to, have to get them back to Bangor. When you cover these things, like I say it sounds dramatic and everything else but it's a hell of a lot of work because you're off first of all collecting your report that you're going to write and then you've got to write it, and then you've got to file it and make sure that Bangor gets it by the deadline. And then you got to worry about the pictures, and by the time you look up it's midnight and everybody's, you know, gone, you know, and then you got to get up early the next morning and start over again. So it's an awful lot of work and what I remember about both of them, as well as about Chicago, was the amount of work and almost drudgery really, once the newness wore off of being in Miami Beach, right.

So I don't remember, I do remember that the Democrats, David Bright and I decided to take a . . . There again the Democrats had some demonstrators, they seem to attract demonstrators more than the Republicans, or did then. And they had all the hippies and yippies and yuppies and whatever. And so David Bright and I decided one morning before the convention opened in the afternoon, late in the afternoon, we said, let's take a walk down to Hippieville. They had taken over this ball park in Miami Beach. So we were walking along, and so I have a crew cut, this is

important to remember, and we're walking along and the cops had these little way stations, they're like grass huts, you know, the tropics, right. And there's a cop in there, it's a station. So I stop, we stop, I said to the officer, I says, Can you tell me how to get to whatever the name of the park was, Liberty Park I think it was, where all the hippies are? He says, sorry, you just keep walking with that haircut and you'll find them soon enough. (*Unintelligible phrase*), and of course all the hippies were longhaired, dope smoking and everything. And he was right because they thought I was an undercover cop, I guess, you know.

**GB:** So you were warmly received by the police?

**KW:** That's right, especially with a guy with me with a camera, so they were sure that we were undercover cops with all these big plots, right. But I remember, anyway so we hung around and we went through and (*unintelligible phrase*), it was a zoo. I mean guys hanging upside down from the goal posts smoking pot.

I mean just, just, and then they organized a big parade, right up Biscayne Boulevard and I saw a picture of it today. In fact Dave Bright made a big poster out of it and we gave one to Ken Curtis when we were back. They had this great big parade and, Biscayne Boulevard is, I mean my God, it's got to be ten, twelve, twenty lanes across, it's the main drag. And here's all the hippies and they got this great big banner, and I don't know if I can say this but I guess (*unintelligible phrase*), great big banner that said, "Fuck the Democrats". And I said, "David, I've got to get in that picture." So I went out in front of the, in front of them, and here I am walking right in front of them and snapped me and behind me there's this great big rabble with this banner. It must have been fifty feet, "Fuck the Democrats" and we made a poster out of it and we gave a picture to Ken Curtis later and he laughed.

But, and they, I mean they had, I think George Wallace had just been, had the attempt made on his life and was in a wheelchair at the time and they had a guy dressed up as George Wallace and they were wheeling him down under this banner. I mean, it was a zoo. So, that was, that convention was more fun than the Republican convention, I've got to say that. That's two for three that were.

**GB:** So you had a couple of fun experiences at least amongst all the work, yeah. All right, wow. All right, well, so do you recall what actually, I mean I imagine at the Republican convention it was pretty much, you know, a safe bet that Nixon, you know, would be their candidate going up for reelection. Do you recall what occurred at the Democratic convention as far as the, was there some last minute battling between candidates, do you recall at all?

**KW:** Boy, I can't, isn't that funny, I just, I just can't. I mean I remember Senator Muskie meeting with the Maine delegation and Governor Curtis of course being there and everything but just, I just can't.

**GB:** Sure. Did you cover the primaries leading up to the convention?

**KW:** Yeah, I must have covered them because I covered politics from '67 to '73 roughly, so yeah, I would have, yeah.

**GB:** Does any of that come to mind, anything that you reported on from the primaries?

**KW:** Well, I remember following, Senator Muskie run, do you want -?

**GB:** Sure, sure.

**KW:** Okay, he was campaigning and it was right in that area and sometime in the early seventies I guess. But, this would be an anecdote to talk about his, quote, terrible temper, you know. We, I had been following him around all day. In those days, unlike now where everything is a TV spot, in those days they actually went around and campaigned at the factory gates. Started five thirty in the morning, Bath Iron Works, the gun manufacturing place in Saco there, Great Northern, you know. The guys were there at five thirty in the morning and they worked, campaigned until, geez, nine, ten at night.

So you know, I'd been following Muskie around southern Maine this day, and there again like I say starting early in the morning. And we were at Sanford, we were at Sanford and he was addressing the Sanford Rotary Club, and this was like, it would have been about seven o'clock, seven thirty at night after a long hard day campaigning, and I was the only reporter there and I was out back taking notes and everything. And somebody said something to him after his speech, you know, or he was still up for the question and answer period, and it just set him off. I mean, he, like a Roman candle, right? And he said in effect, this isn't, these aren't the exact words but this was in effect. He says, look, he says, I don't care if you like it or not, I'm not going to get any votes here anyway and so this is the way it is, you know, take it or leave.

And he (*unintelligible phrase*), you know, and I wrote a column about it and it was a pretty good column, you know, about how he reacted there and everything and the reason for it, because I can't remember the question now but he was right to react that way. And anyway, about three days later I get a letter from Senator Muskie and I mean, I says, oh geez, what, you know, he's got to be really pissed about that column, I'm sure, right? And so I open it, and it's marked personal and confidential down on the bottom of the letter so some secretary doesn't open it. And opened it up and it says, and there again I'm paraphrasing, but this is the gist of it. Dear Ken, I just wanted to drop you a note to say what a, you hit the nail right on the head with that column. That was the best reporting I've seen in the entire campaign, keep up the good work and show them young fellows how to do it up in Bangor. Ed. I've got the letter at home, you know, some-, there again I can't find it, but (*unintelligible phrase*).

Jesus, you know, that temper of his, I guess he used it, how shall I say, strategically. I mean he, he used it as part of his, I mean, to get control over the audience I guess basically. I don't think, in other words I don't think he was as really as mad as I thought he might have been at the time, you know what I mean?

I saw him another time, this is a great story at the *Bangor Daily News*, we still laugh about it today. He was in for an editorial conference meeting and the gal who was doing politics at the time, this was after me, and she says something to the effect, the question was, Okay Senator Muskie, you've done all this stuff for the United States and for the country and everything, can

you tell me what you've done for Maine lately? And, whew, boy did that set him off, you know.

**GB:** I can imagine.

**KW:** It was a good question but maybe it could have been phrased a little more diplomatically, you know. And so that was another instance of his temper. But there again what, in retrospect I often think that he, he knew when to display his temper and not and I think he never got upset about the big things. I think it was the little things that might have set him off. But I think the bigger things, the larger, more important things he reflected a lot. He might have lost his temper but it wasn't the Roman candle kind. So, but that's the only brush I had with his temper and I thought he was going to, you know, be all over me and he actually praised me so, you know.

**GB:** So you must have been very impressed (*unintelligible word*) you got that letter from him.

**KW:** Oh yes, oh my God, yeah, yeah, and I had it tacked up on my bulletin board for a year or so and somebody said, geez, you ought to take that down and save it because, you know, some day that's going to, you're going to appreciate that more than you do now. And I said, geez, boy, that was right, and I did take it down and I put it away and I can't find it, but I know it's in my house someplace. I'll find it some day probably.

**GB:** That's fantastic. So it's your opinion that, you know, he was always in control, very in control of his temper?

**KW:** Yeah, yeah, I think so, yeah. And I think he used it as a, strategically. I think, I may not be saying this right but I would think that he did it more as a control move. In other words, set the mood and then you got them eating out of your hand, they're going to pay attention after you get their attention. That's, I've thought of it that way, I think he, it played to his strength really. But I mean I guess he did have a temper. I never saw any instance of it other than that night at Sanford, that's the only time I ever saw his temper.

**GB:** Now, did you ever have any encounters with Ed Muskie besides as a reporter, did you have any personal encounters with him?

**KW:** No, not really, no.

**GB:** Would you say, did you know him at all, I mean did you get to meet him and talk to him as a reporter?

**KW:** Only as a reporter, yeah. And then I may have met, and then I guess I probably met Jane once or twice but I'm sure she wouldn't remember me, you know. He would remember me because of knowing him, but, and I never met any of the kids. I never met Steve or Ned or any of the kids, so no, I didn't know him all that well. I mean I knew him enough to respect him, you know.

**GB:** Well outside of, you know, we've already talked about his temper. Outside of that what were your personal impressions of him, face to face?

**KW:** Oh I, I mean, first of all physically impressive to start with, that's for starters. And very articulate, smart, I mean just, you know, intelligent as all get out. And I always got the impression that he never suffered fools easily, you know. A little impatient with people who weren't prepared, you know, not prepared to interview him or whatever, you know. And I always figured that he and Senator Smith, Margaret Chase Smith, were a cut above the other politicians. And that's saying something because we've had some darn good ones, I mean you know, we got George Mitchell and Bill Cohen and the group that's there now. We've been lucky, been fortunate in having some great congressional delegations, small but effective.

And I always thought that Senator Muskie and Senator Smith were a cut above, which is not to denigrate the others either because they were all very good but these people were really good. And I always thought that Muskie had a knack for compromising, you know, and, to get the job done. I know that he always stuck to his principles. His integrity was beyond reproach and if he thought something was the right way to do something he wasn't going to compromise his principles, he was going to stick to them, and that was obvious in his career. You know, very impressive man.

**GB:** Did you ever cover Margaret Chase Smith?

**KW:** Yeah, I covered her about the same time of course, yeah, and did a couple of campaigns with her. That was an entirely different experience. She, there again, was smart and very effective and everything. A little, I always thought a little harder to, well, to get to know. The difference in covering, say, her and Ken Curtis. I mean covering Ken Curtis was a joy, I mean it was just fun. Covering Margaret Chase Smith was, you always wanted to be on your toes and proper and everything and there wasn't too much levity around, you know, as there would have been with a Ken Curtis or a John Baldacci or something like that. So you were always sort of on your toes covering her and that was, it wasn't, you know, it wasn't difficult but it was not as much fun as covering some other people. I put it that way diplomatically.

**GB:** I see.

**KW:** Her press secretary, or her, he was more than that, he was her executive assistant, Bill Lewis, who did a lot of work for her and speeches and that sort of thing, was very controlling of her I thought. Nothing wrong with it but I mean, but everything was coordinated pretty much.

**GB:** So would you say it was a bit more forbidding?

**KW:** Yeah, yeah, if that's, that might be too strong a word but you're on the right track, yeah. You wanted to be on your, you know, mind your p's and q's and be on your best behavior I always thought when covering her just because that's the type of person she was. She was a very serious, very serious person.

**GB:** I see.

**KW:** But I can't remember much about covering her either other than, you know, I did the

same thing I did with everybody else, just followed them around and tried to get citizen, you know, voter reaction, that sort of thing. You always try to hang back and get reaction to how speeches went, etcetera.

**GB:** Okay, now, we've talked about Curtis, Margaret Chase Smith and Ed Muskie. What other major politicians did you cover?

**KW:** Well, let's see, Peter Kyros, I've covered him I guess. These would just be on campaigns, you understand. I've been, I've covered with David Emery. I never did John Baldacci because he came along after I got out.

**GB:** Bill Cohen?

**KW:** Bill Cohen, yeah, yeah. Let's see, John Reed was leaving just as I was starting, so Curtis started with John. Oh, Jim Longley. There was an interesting guy, very interesting. His favorite expression was 'think about it' and, but he was a, he really knew how to work the press I thought. I mean he was very, he was right here from Lewiston. And he, you know, was an insurance salesman, very aggressive personality, go get 'em guy, can do guy. I remember once campaigning with him, there again, down in the Sanford area, Biddeford, Saco, and he says, we were going from Biddeford I think to Sanford, and he says, "I'll ride with you." And I, and I was glad he did because I had a nice chance to interview him, to talk with him, but I thought my God, if I get in a wreck here, kill the governor, or the governor to be, I mean, you know. But he invited me up to his camp. I never went, but he always had a way of playing up to the news men, news people to, you know, sort of try to get them on his side I guess.

But he was a, he was right for his time, I mean he, I covered that campaign. He and George Mitchell and Jim Erwin and he won that campaign. He, it was a big upset but our polls showed at the end of that campaign, towards the end of that campaign that he was surging ahead and that was kind of hard to believe, you know, that he was going to beat George Mitchell and Jim Erwin, and he pulled it off. And you could sense it. There again, we started, at that time we started sending teams of reporters out to cover. And for instance I would have Jim Longley for a week, Paul (*name*) would have George Mitchell for a week, and Nancy Remson or somebody would have Jim Irwin and then we'd swap off, and then John Day would take one. And so at the end of the session, we did this for about, geez, three months before the election, so that by the end of it we all got a good feeling for how they were all doing and we all agreed, the guys and gals that had been out in the field, that Jim Longley was, might pull something here.

And because I can remember being up in Houlton and you'd get stuff like, you know, after his speaking and everything, you'd go out in the street and you'd say, you'd do a man in the street interview. And I can remember a guy's telling me, you know, he says, I don't know what that other God damn guy's name is but that third guy that's running there, boy, he's something. I said, you mean Jim Longley? Yeah, that's the guy. They didn't even know his name, but they knew they had seen him or heard him and everything else and he was saying what they wanted to hear about. You know, the size of government and all this stuff. And he seemed to be less of a politician than everybody else running. Of course he was actually more of a politician as it turned out. But he was very popular out in the heartland and you could sense it and you could

pick it up. And you couldn't have picked that up if you were sitting in the office, you know, you can only do this getting out and that's why they're right to have reporters get out and mingle. But he was a very interesting character.

**GB:** So he did a better job campaigning than Mitchell or Irwin?

**KW:** Yeah, I think so. Mitchell was very smart, a good man and everything else but he had a tendency to, well, I don't want to say talk over their heads, but he was always there showing white papers and that sort of thing. Whereas Longley, I mean comparing the two now, Longley was more on the workingman's level I always thought. I guess that's a fair characterization. That's not to take anything away from Senator Mitchell because, I mean, Lord knows he's a smart enough man and in the footsteps of Senator Muskie, you know. I mean, so I wouldn't take anything away from him, I've always got the greatest respect for him. But I always thought Jim Longley appealed more to the common guy, the working stiff, and I think that's basically how he won that election I guess.

**GB:** I see.

**KW:** And then of course Irwin. Irwin was in the same boat as Mitchell. He was up against this populist, you know, and the populist came along at the right time for a change.

**GB:** Do you have any interesting stories, anecdotes, about those other politicians you've mentioned, Kyros, Emery, Cohen, Reed?

**KW:** Oh, I can remember one day campaigning with Peter Kyros. And I can't remember who his aide was, but, his press aide, and we were down in I think it was Boothbay Harbor early in the morning doing the street thing. You know, hi, I'm Peter Kyros. And he came out of the, out of this, anyway, around the corner or something and bumped into his press aide and shook his hand. And it wasn't put on, hi, I'm Peter Kyros. Oh. It was his own aide, right? And I said, I can't believe this. So I wrote that up as a sort of funny little thing, (*unintelligible phrase*), but he wasn't, it wasn't a put on, it wasn't a put up job. No, I can't, there again like I say when I'm driving back home to Bangor I'll think of everything I should have told you.

Just when they would work the street sometimes it could be embarrassing because there was nobody on the street or people weren't paying attention to them. When they worked the mill gates it would be, it was fun to watch them work the mill gates because at five, they had-. Everything was against them because if you worked at five thirty in the morning, or six or whatever, the guys and gals were on their way to work and they couldn't be bothered, right? And if you got them when they came out they really didn't want to be bothered because they were heading for the nearest pub or whatever, you know, or going home.

So it was always interesting to see how the public reacted when they were handing out the fliers and that sort of thing. Some, most people were very polite and would take them and say thank you. A few would just throw them on the ground or whatever, you know, not very many but a few. Some would seem genuinely pleased to meet them, some would think it was a pain in the ass, you know, to have to run the gauntlet.



I remember outside Maremont, the gun works there in Saco, somebody getting in a, in a discussion with Jim Longley. I can't even remember what the subject was now but I mean I remember it was heated, so he got some reaction there. But that's the only time I've ever seen any reaction because basically at the mill gates they're too busy either going in or coming out, you know.

But it was interesting always to see how people reacted. You could tell when they really enjoyed meeting whatever candidate, candidate A or candidate B, and you could tell when they couldn't be bothered. And I always thought you had to have a special kind of ego to be a politician to take that rejection, a lot of the rejection there, you know. I mean, you'd have to be a masochist almost to say I'm going to keep doing this for a living. But that's all changed now I think because, there again, because of TV, the TV spots, everything's done by TV basically. And I think that's too bad. I think everybody loses because you don't get, you get to see what they want you to see in the TV spot.

**GB:** Now, when you were covering Emory, he was a significantly younger candidate, he was, what, twenty-six when he was running for congress or something?

**KW:** Yeah, I was, in fact I was in the Rockland bureau and he was still in high school. He was like a senior in high school or whatever and he was very active then as a young, a young old fogey, you know, as we used to call it. A young conservative Republican. A young fogey I guess is the right term. But he was always political in high school. Conservative guy but there again really soul of the earth, solid kind of a guy, you know, and a good representative of Rockland I thought in being a dependable person. I mean, you might not agree with his conservative views but you knew he was honest, for example.

**GB:** Was the dynamic of his campaign at all different because of his age? Did people react to him differently?

**KW:** Well I really, my only remembrance, recollection of that would be that he may have been young but he didn't act young.

**GB:** Oh, okay.

**KW:** He always seemed older than he was, to me anyway. And there again maybe it's that conservatism, you know, the, he was always like a, well I guess today you'd call him a nerd. You know, a high school geek or a nerd, computer nerd. I mean big on computers and, a techie, there you go, a techie person. And so that was just part of his personality. Nice guy, like I say, he's solid.

In fact I don't recall anybody, covering anybody that I disliked, you know, personally disliked. I mean, I always admired all of them actually, and I think that's why I enjoyed the job so much because I always admired how they all could think on their feet, you know. And I could, you know, you ask me something and, you know, two days later I'll have the answer. I was thinking, geez, I wish I'd have said that, you know. But these people can think right on their feet, and of course I guess that comes with experience and everything, but to think, to be sharp like that and

do it over, make a, have a good track record and do it consistently and, you know, is something I think, to be able to.

**GB:** Now of all of these politicians you've covered over the years, does any one stand out as the most interesting to report on?

**KW:** Yeah, well there again, I guess my favorite would have to be Ken Curtis. Governor Longley was certainly as interesting a character as you would want to meet. He, well he got various reactions out of various people. I remember Louis Jalbert here, right here from Lewiston, Mr. Democrat, never got a long with him, never. I mean he, if you ever, if you wanted to hear the scoop on Jim Longley you could ask Louis Jalbert. They, as I recall they never got along worth beans and that's probably because they knew each other, you know what I mean, grew up (*unintelligible phrase*). But, well, there was a politician. He wasn't on the national level but Louis Jalbert probably was the most interesting guy that anybody would ever want to cover.

**GB:** Really?

**KW:** Oh yeah.

**GB:** Tell me about him, what was he like?

**KW:** Very colorful individual and, there again, catered to the press. But knew politics inside out, knew all the dirty tricks, knew all the, knew what to do in every situation. And, I mean he called himself Mr. Democrat. He insisted that you call him Mr. Democrat. And so we always used to write it, Louis Jalbert, Jalbert, who likes to call himself Mr. Democrat, and he'd come up to you and, if he was mad at something you'd written he'd back you in a corner, put his finger in your chest and keep pounding on your chest and driving home his point, and all for show, you know. He made sure he had an audience. So if you got, could stand that and get through that phase of it, then he gradually came to accept you probably. You know, I mean if you showed that you could as a reporter cut the mustard so to speak. But he was a very, very colorful guy, I mean just a bullshit artist but also capable. I mean, did a lot of things for his people here in Lewiston and was I thought, always thought, quite effective.

**GB:** How did other people react to his calling himself Mr. Democrat? What did people think of that?

**KW:** As you might expect, that it was bluster. They would never call him Mr. Democrat, you know what I mean. They would, they or if they did, they'd qualify it like I just said, you know, the gentleman from Lewiston who prefers to call him-, prefers to be known as Mr. Democrat. No, he was the only one who wanted, who I ever knew of who called himself that, ever called that. So as you might expect the reaction would be one of, you know, that's Jalbert.

**GB:** Take it with a grain of salt?

**KW:** Yeah, really, yeah.

**GB:** All right, okay. So in 1973 you, now let me see if I can get this straight, is that when you became the Maine editor?

**KW:** I think probably I had become that somewhere in between '67 and '73.

**GB:** Oh, okay.

**KW:** But I, it, right in that area someplace. And I was doing both jobs anyway. I know that. I was juggling my duties in the main office with the legislature.

*(Break in taping.)*

**GB:** You were saying?

**KW:** I was juggling my duties between Augusta and Bangor, you know, trying to run the main desk operation in Bangor and trying to cover the legislature. And eventually we got more help. The guy who succeeded me, I think it was John Day, stayed right over there, just covered the legislature and politics and we made him a full time job. But I was trying to do both.

**GB:** I see, I see.

**KW:** Rough hours. But again, exciting, you know, and geez, when you're excited and you're, you don't care about the hours, you know.

**GB:** And did you continue, so you continued reporting for the remainder of your time with the paper?

**KW:** Yeah, but when I was promoted to Maine editor, I only did the occasional story. And then when I became associate managing editor, assistant managing editor, what not, I didn't do any reporting all. Rather, all I did was write the column, I wrote the column, been writing the column for, geez, thirty years, thirty plus.

**GB:** And you said you still write a weekly column to this day?

**KW:** Yeah, yeah, it's Saturday morning on the Op Ed page.

**GB:** And what's that column?

**KW:** There's no name for it but it's just a general interest column and it's just like I say, modified smart ass. I just let it all hang out and, you know, I just, yeah, you never know what I'm going to write about, you know? But it's, I've just done it very loose and, you know, tell a few stories. I'd say general interest, slash, humor, question mark.

**GB:** All right, all right. All right, now I have a note here and I'm not sure if it's relevant, would it mean anything to you if I mention the Longley commission?

**KW:** Yeah, it would mean that I should know, I should remember it but I can't. The Longley commission, I'd have to have a few more prompts I guess to get me going on that one.

**GB:** I'm wondering, see, I have this kind of generic note and I'm really not sure what it means. I have the Longley commission and then I have something about a Curtis, Ken Curtis appointment, but I'm not sure if they're related.

**KW:** Yes, they are.

**GB:** Okay, I thought they were but I wasn't sure.

**KW:** Yeah, he appointed him to this commission to I think, now here again I'll be proven wrong. But seems to me that it was a commission to study government, the workings of government or the state budget or something. And anyway from that commission was born Jim Longley the candidate.

**GB:** Oh really?

**KW:** Yeah, and he used that commission as a springboard to his gubernatorial campaign to run for governor.

**GB:** Oh, really.

**KW:** Yeah, and that's what that cryptic note's about. But as far as the details, now I can remember there were some hard feelings it seems to me towards the end of it. In other words, Curtis appointed him in good faith and he was going to be a good soldier and all that sort of thing. And then when he got to work in this commission as I recall he sort of got the idea that he probably could be the governor of the state as well as anybody and why don't I run and he did and he won. But it all sprang from that Longley commission, that's right.

**GB:** Oh wow, wow.

**KW:** And, but it was, it was one of these studies of government, as I recall. And it might have had something to do with insurance also since he was an insurance tycoon, quote, unquote. I mean he was big in the insurance industry and maybe, maybe Curtis appointed him because of his background in insurance. But it was some sort of commission to investigate government as I recall, to study I should say, not investigate. But it was his springboard to the governorship.

**GB:** So Curtis is partly to blame for Longley's governorship.

**KW:** Yeah, as I recall, yeah.

**GB:** All right, now tell me, had there been a lot or was there a lot of competition between the *Bangor Daily News* and the Gannett newspapers?

**KW:** Yeah, there always has been healthy competition. We, at least among the shall one say entities. Among the working reporters, no, you know what I mean, we all covered stories and we help each other. You wouldn't want the home office to know that basically lots of times, but we do help each other. So as far as the working level, why, it's one thing. But yeah, there's been competition. We have the, we cover the real Maine and they cover the other Maine. We have the eastern and northern counties and we, up until, we always were the largest daily north of Boston.

Our circulation used to be eighty-five, eighty-seven thousand on weekdays and up over a hundred five, a hundred-six thousand on weekends. But then everybody's circulation went in the tank about ten years ago, and we're climbing back. Now I don't know where we are now but we're not back to where we were. And I don't know what their circulation is but we always billed ourselves as the largest daily north of Boston, north of the *Boston Globe*. Because they had the *Evening Express* and the *Press Herald* and then the *Sunday Telegram*, but you would have, you'd have had to add the *Evening Express* to the *Press Herald* to exceed our circulation. So it was always a battle that way.

**GB:** What caused that big plummet in circulation?

**KW:** Oh, modern technology, the Internet, electronics, television. It just, newspapers generally, well not becoming obsolete, but newspapers enjoyed the, have already enjoyed the heyday. I mean the star is descending I would think because of the electronic, because of the instant communication. People, a lot of people, younger people especially I think have never gotten used to reading like the older generation. And I think there will always be a place for newspapers and, but it's changed. And that was all part of the circulation dip when, with the electronic explosion, with TV and all.

**GB:** Hold on one sec.

*End of Side B, Tape One*  
*Side A, Tape Two*

**GB:** . . . and I live in Lewiston.

**KW:** Oh, all right, yeah, good, yeah, so you know all about the Gannetts and the *Lewiston Sun* and then the *Bangor News*, I mean.

**GB:** Well I don't know a whole lot outside of the *Lewiston Sun-Journal* before working on this project, actually, you know, I didn't know a lot of those papers. But yeah, yeah, I grew up on the *Lewiston Sun-Journal*, getting that, you know, every day for the last twelve years now that I've lived here so, all right. So, do you have any idea how low the circulation hit when it, like, rock bottom, yeah.

**KW:** Geez, I don't, because it was after I left but I think they were down into the, I'm going to say high sixties, high, you know, sixty eight thousand, somewhere in there I would think. And, you know, roughly a twenty thousand drop. This is ball park figures, don't hold me to it, but I

know that it was a wicked dip. And it's not come back up.

**GB:** Did that have an effect on employment? Did people, were people laid off because of that? Did it have that much of an impact?

**KW:** Not really. We had, we were in that phase where we cut back like everybody else did. In fact I took early retirement, I retired at age fifty-nine. But, I had my thirty years in, but I still had intended to work another six, seven years. But they made me an offer I couldn't refuse including being able to write my column. But with all the benefits and the medical coverage and all that, you know, you almost had to retire.

So we went through all that cut back, cutting back that every corporation did and that was, this is '91 so that was about the same time, yeah. But I don't think it was peculiar to the newspaper industry, I mean everybody was cutting back, downsizing was the word, is the word. And now I've noticed, at least at the *Bangor News*, from all the new names I see, new bylines and things, it seems to me their creeping back up in employment. But I, in answer to your question, I don't think that the cut back that we went through was due to decreasing circulation. It was more due to the fact that it was the in thing to downsize corporations all over the country, you know.

**GB:** All right, now let me ask you, when you became editor did that change your perspective on reporting or on the issues that you were covering?

**KW:** No, the guiding principle in the newspaper business is just try to be fair to both sides. And as an editor if I, if you had me, you were my reporter and you handed me a story and I saw holes in it I would just give it back to you and say, look, you've got to get a hold of candidate B. I mean even if he tells you to go and take a leap, you know, you got to contact him because otherwise it's going to look like, you know, this is too one sided and you're doing a hatchet job on this other guy. So as an editor it becomes, you try to do that as a reporter, you know you've got to balance your stories and all that. This is news stories as compared to columns, editorial columns, you understand. And so, but as an editor you're even more conscious of it because you, by that stage in your career you ought to be able to pick up a story and see the holes in it, see what's missing. And so you'd hand back stories and you, if the reporter couldn't fill that hole that night, couldn't answer the questions, you held it, you would hold it a night until you could get a reasonably balanced story of it.

**GB:** I see.

**KW:** I mean, but you become more conscious as an editor of all, of the fairness issues, see.

**GB:** All right. Now, you already said that your political beliefs have remained I guess fairly consistent over the years, but did your encounters with candidates have any impact on you, on either I guess broadly or on particular issues? Did you kind of change, any of them change your perspective at any point?

**KW:** Well yeah, I suppose they did in subtle ways that I probably don't even know. For one thing, well, going back to early in our interview, it showed me that, remember my father's

words, he's a pretty good guy for a Democrat? Well there are a lot of pretty good people even though they are Democrats or even though they are Republicans and everything. I think one thing it's shown me is that I don't like the far left and I don't like the far right politics. I just find them both just out of my ball park. I like them more towards the, they don't have to be in the center but at least towards the center.

But I find far left and far right, the extremes, not a pretty picture lots of times. I mean one is kooky, far left seems to be really, you know, far out. And the far right seems to be intolerant and I don't, you know, I've never cared for intolerance. But other than that I guess it showed me the art of compromise, I've seen that work. Probably a better appreciation for environmental concerns, which at one time I never thought much about but I can see the arguments there. Just that people, regardless of their political affiliation or political label are still people and you got to deal with them one on one no matter what their political beliefs or color or anything, you know, it's still the individual. They're either a decent person or not.

**GB:** All right. One more thing, you mentioned of course that John Day would be a good source of information.

**KW:** Excellent.

**GB:** Okay, could you tell me about him?

**KW:** Yeah, John Day is a Maine native, he's from Harrison, University of Maine graduate in journalism. Came to work for the *Bangor News* the same, about the same year I did. He was the Machias bureau chief, I was the Rockland bureau chief, and he was always much more of a political animal than I ever was. And he became political writer after me I guess, about in the mid seventies, wrote a column. And then he became our Washington bureau chief, we sent him to Washington. And that, we, I guess at the time when we did it it wasn't necessarily going to be a permanent thing and then it turned into one.

He's lived there for years now, I'm going to say twenty years anyway, and has his own apartment down there and everything, townhouse or whatever. But is, comes home to cover the campaigns, any time there's a campaign involving congress he comes home to cover it. He's traveled extensively with Senator Muskie when Senator Muskie was secretary of state. He knows, because the delegation is so small he knows them all intimately, you know. I mean, he knows how they think and things, so he's a very good contact and I would think would be an excellent contact for this project.

**GB:** Great, wonderful. All right, well, I'm all done with my questions so do you have any final remarks you'd like to make, anything you'd like to add or emphasize?

**KW:** Well, no, it's just, it's been an interesting career, newspapering, you know, it's the only thing I ever wanted to do and if I had it to do over again I wouldn't change a thing really. You know, it's one of those deals where you always were anxious to come to work, get up in the morning and want to go to work. And I can't imagine being in any other where, I would want to be in a job that I hated to go to work. So newspapering in general has always been a very, an

exciting thing to me.

And covering politics was an interesting part of it, and meeting people, there again, being able to meet people like George Mitchell and Bill Cohen and Senator Muskie, you know, that was, that was a thrill really. And, as well as a lot of people not in politics, you know, just, it's a good, I'd recommend a newspapering career for anyone. But other than that, no. I just hope this, you can make some sense of it, just rambling on, you know.

**GB:** Oh no, it's fantastic. Yeah, you're a wonderful story teller.

**KW:** Well, I don't know. Like I say, I'm sure I can think of many interesting things when it doesn't count. When we're off the air so to speak, but, you know, thanks for asking me by the way, I'm flattered to be asked.

**GB:** Oh, it was my privilege interviewing you, and if you come up with a bunch of stories you'd like to tell me, you know, give us a call and we can, you know, get those out.

**KW:** Sure, thank you.

*End of Interview*